Containing the Other: Issues of Control and Power in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Moonstone*

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Wilkie Collins and Sensational Fiction

There is a moment in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* when Walter Hartright, the hero of the story, is confronted by Marian Halcombe with the shaming truth that he has fallen in love with her sister, Laura Fairlie, and that the former lady has discovered it without recourse to anything but her own observations. She further strongly urges Walter to conquer this passion and to "trample it under foot like a man!":

> The suppressed vehemence with which she spoke, the strength which her will- concentrated in the look she fixed on me, and in the hold on my arm that she had not yet relinquished- communicated to mine, steadied me…At the end of that time, I had justified her generous faith in my manhood- I had, outwardly at least, recovered my self-control.[1]

The somewhat peculiar scene epitomizes several forces at work in Collins' novels, particularly embodied in Walter's loss of self-control, a weakness which seems to plague many characters in the novels to be considered. Marian's forceful grasp implies another related theme of the author's work, that of how compromised self-control can lead to, or signify, a susceptibility to a dominating control exerted by others. As can also be surmised from the scene, these underlying anxieties about self-control and control involve issues of social and gender roles, questions of whether women's control over men can be dangerous, and what allows for the domination of one social category over another. Collins's novels *The Woman in White*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone* demonstrate an especial interest in these issues of control, which become narrative tools that the author uses to engage with prevailing cultural anxieties about the potential threats from individuals in marginalized social categories, particularly women and those of foreign racial heritage. It will be the purpose of this investigation to explore how the related themes of self-control, interpersonal control, and control of knowledge function in the novels with regards

[1] Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (USA: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985) 81. All further quotations will be taken from this edition.

to the representation of these social categories, and how the novels use these themes to define and construct social power dynamics.

Collins's novels are included in a subgenre of Victorian literature called sensation fiction, which flourished and reached a zenith of popularity in England during the 1860s, enticing a large reading audience while also demoralizing many literary critics. As Lyn Pykett has observed, "sensation novels were pre-eminently tales of modern life,"[2] their authors turning away from the Gothic literary tradition of externalizing conflict in exotic castles, and instead turning their gaze inward to scrutinize problems at home. Winifred Hughes illustrates this change in direction as a replacement of the "terror of the unknown" with the "terror of the familiar,"[3] presenting to the reading public the idea that depravity, villainy, bigamy, and other moral perversions could be at work in English society, even in the protected realm of domestic life itself. Sensation novels, however, did not create these anxieties, but rather reflected existing fears resulting from contemporary social disruption; as Pykett delineates, this time period saw upsets in societal standards, from sensationalized bigamy cases[4] to the Woman question and confusion about women's domestic role and social identity,[5] in addition to ongoing struggles with England's colonies and its imperialist identity. Sensation authors were consequently writing at a time when it seemed as though established boundaries and barriers of class distinction, gender roles, and family life were either being broken down or readjusted.

For those authors like Wilkie Collins, this meant engaging with social issues through their fiction. In novels like *The Woman in White* and *Armadale*, Collins particularly foregrounds issues of social and legal justice for women and England's colonial subjects, respectively.

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[2] Lyn Pykett, The Sensation Novel (UK: Norcote House Publishers Ltd, 1994) 4.
[3] Winifred Hughes, The Maniac in the Cellar (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 8.
[4] Pykett 2
[5] Pykett 9-10

However, while these novels underline a need to reform many societal standards, norms, and prejudices, in many respects they also show traces of middle-class anxieties regarding class infiltration, the breakdown of national and racial boundaries, the upset of well-defined gender roles, and the possibility of female usurpation of male power. While in the novels under analysis, Collins ostensibly interests himself in a broadened view of society, including in his work women with agentic roles and mixed-race individuals with complex psychologies, there simultaneously exists a tendency to undermine and counteract the subversive potential that these characters embody.

While the author's impetus may have been to expand the limits of the social categories he presents, his novels ultimately illustrate an underlying trajectory to control the power of these individuals through their physical and social containment, which seems to manifest itself in three expressions of control within power dynamics: a threat to, or loss of, the control over bodily containment of knowledge, the counteraction of female sexual threat that undermines male self-control, and the subordination of the racial Other to a controlling English power. In the first instance, several characters in the novels suffer from a constitutional inability to control their bodies, which often leads to a breach of secrets or knowledge that are figured as being physically contained within them. As those who lose power to control their secrets are socially marginal characters, women and those that are racially foreign, this implies an underlying anxiety about the power these individuals might wield in withholding knowledge; their endowment with these permeable bodies, which are literally incapable of concealing their secrets from other characters, functions to limit their potential power, and conditions their position as social "Others." The novels' depictions of women's sexuality imply a similar need for a counteraction of female sexual power, as Collins portrays this power as a disruptive force that threatens male self-control

and which particularly undermines their control over knowledge; the author defuses this threat in turn by undermining the agency of these temptresses, and by the implicit approval of a double standard wherein only male sexual power is justified. Finally, as the novels explore the danger in women's subversion of patriarchal sexual dynamics, they also consider the threat of racial Others' subversion of English imperial control, implying the possibility of these racially different characters' potential rebellions only to re-emphasize and re-construct their subordination to a reassuring English power, embodied in the English hero.

Permeable Bodies: Lack of Bodily Self-control and the Loss of Knowledge

As Tamar Heller argues in *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*, knowledge in Sensation Fiction is a form of power.[6] Because knowledge is so valuable there seems to exist an underlying current of anxiety in the novels about losing control over secret information. These novels notably figure the ability to keep secrets and emotions hidden as a bodily challenge, one which is revealed when characters fear losing self-control, or do lose self-control, which can breach a protected cache of knowledge. Collins frequently depicts these characters' bodies as physical vessels that contain their secret knowledge, a portrayal that comments on both the physical capacity of these individuals, as well as their socially marginal status. The illustration of women and racially different characters as containers of knowledge particularly suggests a physical lack of complexity or inferiority, but also objectifies these individuals; by implying that their bodies are equivalent to vessels which contain knowledge, the author subtly dehumanizes these characters, reducing their bodies' meaning to the significance of 'things.' That these characters' knowledge is so simplistically contained within their bodies also

[6] Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 152.

allows for the reassuring possibility that their secret knowledge can also be simplistically obtained by other characters, as vessels have the potential to leak or to be opened.

The femme fatale Lydia Gwilt from *Armadale* is perhaps the only character of the three novels who is aware of this relationship between maintaining self-control and knowledge, and who articulates this anxiety. Surprising even herself with her honorable intentions, Lydia abandons her previous life of deceit, marries Ozias Midwinter after a loving courtship, moves with him to Italy for the purposes of his work, and almost immediately begins to sense a gradual loss of his affections. Desperate to locate the cause of their marriage's failure, she wonders if "there is an unutterable Something left by the horror of [her] past life, which clings invisibly to [her] still," or "whether any unconscious disclosure of the truth escapes [her] in the close intimacy that now unites [them]?" [7] Her fear that "an unutterable Something" might "cling" to her implies a belief in the bodily expression of her secrets, here imagined to mark her and so reveal the treacheries of her past life to Midwinter. Her superstitious anxiety that an "unconscious disclosure of the truth escapes [her]" also suggests that this knowledge is a quantity that she normally retains within her body, and that in marrying Midwinter she has lost control over her self-containment of secrets. Thus, in tracing the reasons for her husband's coldness, Lydia hypothesizes a connection between her imagined failure of self-control, which she figures as a compromised bodily control over knowledge, and the subsequent revelation of her damaging secrets to Midwinter.

Further, that Lydia connects this loss of bodily self-control over her contained secrets to the new circumstances of their marriage implies that she feels it is the marital dynamic that could have effected this unwilling exchange. She locates the cause of this involuntary transmission to

[7] Wilkie Collins, Armadale, ed. Catherine Peters (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1989) 660. All further quotations will be taken from this edition.

her husband in the new situation of the "close intimacy" of marriage, which obliquely alludes to the sexual boundaries that have been broken between the two individuals, a condition that is necessarily veiled due to Victorian restrictions of a direct discussion of sexual relations. Thus, this connection of the loss of control over her secrets with this new marital closeness implies Lydia's fear that the dissolution of sexual barriers could in turn destroy the physical boundaries that she has constructed to hide her past history. Even though the "unutterable Something" she fears marks her is invisible, she obviously still feels that it is Midwinter, now in the character of her husband, who will have the unique ability to see "the horror of [her] past life" written on her body. And while during their courtship Lydia dominated Midwinter with her sexual allure, her confessions to her diary show that she is anxious that the new power dynamic of her marriage with Midwinter, which she implies invests him with a privileged access to her body, will place her in a subordinated position by effecting an unwilling revelation of her hidden past to him. Lydia's experience hence illustrates an anxiety about the personal and physical breakdown of boundaries which she connects to an unwilling transference of secret knowledge to a man whom she no longer controls, and fears may instead now possess power over her body and her body's contents.

Whereas Lydia only theorizes that her new role as wife has undermined her control of knowledge through a bodily breach that allows her husband access to her secrets, Collins in fact renders many of his characters' bodies similarly permeable, giving them a vulnerability that does often lead to a loss of bodily control over their secrets, enriching another character with this knowledge. As mentioned before, that these are women and racially different characters, members of traditionally marginal groups, suggests that Collins depicts this relationship between a loss of bodily self-control and lack of power in order to limit the agency of these social groups

within the novels. Actually realizing what Lydia only fears, Midwinter, for example, is depicted as a character who frequently loses self-control over the secrets he tries to suppress; this loss is communicated in the novel through his physical bursts of deep emotion, and is implicitly linked to his mixed-race heritage. During the first part of the novel, while Midwinter's father Mr. Armadale relates his significant deathbed confession, that of killing the real Allan Armadale's father, the initially unwilling transcriber Mr. Neal slowly falls in love with Mrs. Armadale, a native of Trinidad. Much is made of her irresistible beauty and grace, her "delicate dark hand" and her "full deep African eyes [which] looked at him in submissive entreaty" (27) all of which causes Mr. Neal to submit to her request in writing the document for her husband. Mrs. Armadale presents a pleasing picture of exotic beauty, the emphasis on her racial difference only working to underline her virtue of feminine passivity and self sacrifice; when she realizes that Mr. Neal's only concerns in writing her husband's testament relate to her, she replies, "I am deeply grateful, but I entreat you not to think of *me*…What my husband wishes in his last moments, I wish too"(24).

But whereas Mrs. Armadale's appearance and manner only adds to the charm of her femininity, her son's aspect elicits just the opposite reaction; his appearance seems to repel rather than attract. When he is found in Allan Armadale's neighborhood, his mixed race is noted indirectly, the novel making a negative spectacle of him: "his tawny complexion, …brown eyes, and his black beard, gave him something of a foreign look," while instead of his mother's "delicate dark hand" and bewitching manner he possesses "dusky hands [that] were wiry and nervous"(68) and an off-putting, dishonest manner (73). This transformation from the beautifully exotic mother, to the unattractive, and even sinister-looking, son, hints at an important relationship between racial difference and gender roles. Mrs. Armadale's racial difference does

not appear to conflict with her performance of a feminine gender role, especially that of the loving wife, which would tend to suggest a similarity between the restrictions placed on both of these socially marginal categories. That this early description of Midwinter reveals such an unpleasing picture of racial difference consequently implies a conflict between his racial heritage and his masculine gender role, the latter of which requires not submission, but dominance in a heterosexual power dynamic. This important incompatibility of Midwinter's gender and racial roles is a complication that will be explored in subsequent discussions of Midwinter's social subordination and his attempt to gain power in a heterosexual dynamic.

Collins, however, ostensibly denies xenophobia and fear of racial difference through the character of Reverend Decimus Brock, whose own overtly expressed racism becomes almost laughable: "The rector's healthy Anglo-Saxon flesh crept responsively at every casual movement of the usher's [Midwinter's] supple brown fingers, and every passing distortion of the usher's haggard yellow face"(73). However, while attempting to distance the novel from a racist perspective on Midwinter, in focusing so much on his appearance, as well as his affective state, the author also emphasizes his recurring inability to maintain self-control, especially when attempting to suppress knowledge. When Midwinter receives an unsettling letter from Mr. Brock which informs him that a danger to Armadale's life still exists, this anxiety reveals itself to this same friend as "a marked change in the face that confronted him"(264), which Midwinter attempts to hide by mimicking Allan's own affect and normal good humor. This works to catastrophic effect, his affective disguise instead causing him to completely lose self-control; his "spirits…[mount] hysterically beyond his own control"(266), ending in a "convulsive violence"(271) of laughter that finally precipitates Armadale's forceful removal of him from the company of the Milroys, the tenants whom they are visiting. In portraying Midwinter's hysterical

breakdown, the novel again revels in the spectacle of him, here expressed as the emotional exhibition of his failure to hide from his friend the secrets that he feels that Armadale should not know. By illustrating that such an extreme loss of control results from Midwinter's attempt to suppress information, the novel's portrayal implies that Midwinter suffers from a physiological incapacity to physically conceal the traces of his secret worries from others.

Later situations also imply that Midwinter cannot hide secrets or emotions particularly from Allan Armadale, his savior and friend, and that Armadale has a privileged insight into his friend's vainly buried anxieties, a dynamic conditioned by Midwinter's racial difference. Both men fall in love with Lydia Gwilt, whom they know only as the governess of Miss Milroy, which precipitates the climax of the novel as Armadale covertly investigates the past of his intended fiancé only to find that she may have a disreputable history of prostitution. Convinced by his lawyer that Miss Gwilt could be a threat to his first love, Miss Milroy, Armadale agrees to have her privately watched, a secret that Lydia relates to Midwinter when they chance to meet in the street after the latter's brief absence from the town. When Midwinter comes to confront his friend about this dishonorable action, the former attempts to conceal his worries and defer the painful questions, but Armadale perceives his unease and anxiety, exclaiming that there "seems to be something strange between [them]!"(478). Thus, Midwinter realizes that once again he has been unable to hide his secret motive from Armadale, which has instead "shown itself in a restraint of word, look, and action which had been marked enough to force its way to Allan's notice"(478); his body again betrays to his friend the secret knowledge that he most especially wanted to hide. When Armadale begs to justify his surveillance of Lydia, Midwinter loses self-control in his anger: " 'Explain!' cried Midwinter, his eyes aflame, and his hot Creole blood rushing crimson into his face"(479). Instead of winning him the argument, though, Midwinter's

outburst again allows Armadale insight into his friend's anger, and he finally connects his friend's "violence"(480) with a secret love for Lydia Gwilt: "Allan's instinct had guessed, and the guiding influence stood revealed of Midwinter's interest in Miss Gwilt"(480). Literally coloring this dynamic of an unwilling flow of knowledge from Midwinter to Allan, at the peak of the former's fury his "hot Creole blood" flushes into his face, a sudden sign of his racial difference that implies a link between his loss of control- which in turn becomes a loss of control over knowledge- and racial heritage. That this particular moment guides Armadale's intuition suggests that it is Midwinter's mixed race that makes him susceptible to his friend's ability to see through his physical attempts to control knowledge, allowing Allan to glean the substance of his guarded secret. Whereas Lydia's imagined loss of control originated in the marital dynamics subordinating her body, and its secrets, to her husband's power, here the novel implies that the cause of Midwinter's physiological weakness for betraying secrets is in fact his racial difference.

Thus, while ostensibly painting a liberal and complex portrait of him as the equal and friend of the English hero, the novel simultaneously reassures its English audience that Midwinter is a racial Other. It will be useful, here, to introduce Edward Said's conception of the Other, what he perceived as the Oriental Other, which he argued was a social category constructed by the English that embodied their understanding of "the Orient," a label used to define what was in reality a wide diversity of foreign nationalities, many under England's colonial power. Said describes how the Western representation of this category of people, the texts generated and the history reconstructed by Western scholars, worked essentially to contain these individuals through the identity assigned to them by this perpetuated fiction of complete demystification; he describes this construction as aided by "the triumphant technique for taking the immense fecundity of the Orient and making it systematically, even alphabetically, knowable

by Western laymen."[8] Collins's work betrays an Orientalist trajectory particularly in this demonstrated underlying anxiety about racial Others' ability to conceal secrets, to hide information from English society, which is a threat controlled above through a portrayal of Midwinter's physical inability to contain knowledge. Thus, the novels' portrayals of racially different characters as "knowable" attempt to counteract this fearful concept that these individuals could withhold their secrets, stripping them of their control over knowledge, and consequently any power to use these secrets against their English betters.

The Moonstone continues to develop this construction of the Other through the character of Ezra Jennings, suggesting by his even more intense suppression of his secret past that containment of knowledge in mixed-race outsiders is a dangerous possibility for English society. Ezra, like Midwinter, is a social outcast that the English hero, Franklin Blake, befriends though all agree "his appearance is against him,"[9] particularly because of his visible racial difference. Unlike *Armadale*, in this novel the audience is also privy to Franklin's perspective and impressions with regards to Ezra's strange appearance: when Franklin first meets the physician's assistant, he observes that "his complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows…His nose presented the fine shape and modeling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible in the new races of the West" (343). Heller reads the amalgamated physical characteristics used to describe Ezra as an indication of miscegenation, which is also suggested by his reluctance to talk about his mother's race;[10] in response to Franklin's query about his birthplace, Ezra responds "I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother- We are straying away

[8] Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 65.
[9] Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone, Ed.George State (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005)344. All further quotations will be taken from this edition.
[10] Heller 157

from our subject…"(391). Here the novel also diverges from *Armadale*'s open admission of Midwinter's origins, instead cloaking Ezra's racial background in obscurity. His attempt to conceal his origins implies a relationship between racial difference and containment of secrets that becomes much more sinister in this novel, as it directly suggests a racial heritage that is possibly shameful and even dangerous. His concealment prohibits the exact categorization of his racial difference, leaving the reading audience unable to define this difference, thus making the possibilities of his racial Otherness unquantifiable and seemingly uncontainable for the reader.

Ezra's mystification of his racial origins consequently becomes subsumed into his general vow of secrecy, a physical and bodily suppression of knowledge which accompanies his failure to relinquish complete control over his past history to anyone in the novel, even the hero himself. As the mysterious man states to Franklin when he feels called upon to relate part of his circumstances before being taken into his new friend's confidence, " I don't profess, sir, to tell my story (as the phrase is) to any man. My story will die with me"(398). Ezra's refusal to confess his secrets to an Englishman also departs from *Armadale*, where Midwinter's purposeful, and conscientious, failure to tell Allan the secret of their fathers' relationship, and the treachery of Allan's mother, is compensated for by his complete and open confession to an Englishman representing Allan as a father, the clergyman Mr. Brock. In *The Moonstone*, however, there not only exists no complete confession, but also no feeling of obligation on Ezra's part to relinquish his hold over all of his secrets to the English hero. Collins also more explicitly describes Ezra as a vessel of knowledge, physically containing innumerable secrets within himself, illustrated when he declines, due to matters of conscience, to allow Franklin to view his transcription of Mr. Candy's feverish utterances which the hero feels could solve his mystery: " [Franklin] stood and watched [Ezra], walking farther and farther away from [him]; carrying farther and farther away

with him what [Franklin] now firmly believed to be the clue of which [he] was in search"(397). Franklin's perception of Ezra "carrying" this knowledge away from him suggests an underlying current of resentment that the physician's assistant denies the hero access to the repository of knowledge which the former embodies. However, this policy of containing his secrets through repression, physically expressed in Ezra's extreme manner of self-control, is ultimately marked as abnormal through its association with physical pain and dysfunction, which all works to undermine his power of self-containment.

This physical pain erupts when Ezra insists on giving Franklin a partial account of his past life, asserting that in having lost his reputation, he must at least explain the fact of his dishonor so as to let Franklin decide if he is fit to possess a gentleman's secret. However, even the prospect of this incomplete confession results in a physical struggle within Ezra's hermetically sealed body:

> The grip of some terrible emotion seemed to have seized him, and shaken him to the soul. His *gipsy complexion* had altered to a livid grayish paleness; his eyes had suddenly become *wild and glittering*; his voice had dropped to a tone- low, stern, and resolute- which I now heard for the first time. The *latent resources* in the man, for good or for evil- it was hard, at that moment to say which, *leapt up in him and showed themselves to me*, with the suddenness of a flash of light (398; my emphasis).

Franklin's description shows that Ezra's body violently resists this process of releasing even part of his personal history; the bodily anguish that accompanies this partial confession of his secrets both reveals the incredible strength of Ezra's physical containment, and stigmatizes the nature of such a containment by portraying the abnormal and painful reaction that results from his attempt to loosen this intense physical control. In addition, like Midwinter's flush of "Creole blood," Ezra's "gipsy complexion" again calls attention to his mixed-race features, and becomes a pertinent reminder of racial difference at the moment when he fights to control himself, figured here as an internal battle with his habitual repression of knowledge. Unlike Midwinter, though,

Ezra's abbreviated confession emphasizes not only his racial difference, but also his social inferiority to Franklin, a gentleman, as he is a man who has lost his character, rendering him an outcast of society. In demonstrating Ezra's position of inferiority in relation to Franklin, the novel translates this intensified social marginalization into the severe, and almost violent breach of Ezra's bodily concealment of knowledge. Whereas Midwinter's oddities of manner often allow Armadale to perceive his underlying motives or hidden information, here the "latent resources" of Ezra are depicted as actually "showing themselves to [Franklin]"(398) uncontrollably, Collins personifying this hidden knowledge as a substance that seems to will itself to be possessed by a white Englishman. While Franklin cannot interpret what he sees, or rather what is shown to him by Ezra's body, and never does possess the history of Ezra's dishonor, the novel yet partially compensates for this inequality of knowledge by thus qualifying the latter's rigid self-containment of secrets. Consequently, the novel reaffirms the conflation of lack of social power with physiological weakness in order to again comfort the reader that membership in a category of social marginality disallows complete concealment of knowledge from English society.

However, Ezra maintains much of his mystery by never divulging his complete history, requiring the novel's ultimate censure of his containment of secrets and culminating in his "incurable internal complaint"(400), the unnamed disease that makes him suffer all through his personal narrative before it kills him offstage. The accompanying pain of Ezra's physical concealment especially highlights the novel's criticism of his repression; in the above-quoted passage, he experiences a physical turmoil as he prepares himself to relate some of the events of his life, a pain which only worsens during his confession to the point that "[his] whole being seemed to be absorbed in the agony of recollecting" (399), connecting physical pain with the

contemplation of suppressed knowledge. Implying that his racial difference is both associated with his repression of secrets, is itself a contained secret, and that Ezra's physical repression of information is internally painful, seeming to result from his internal disease, the novel strongly highlights the abnormality in a racial Other's concealment of knowledge. *The Moonstone* hence reassures its English audience in a way different from *Armadale*; while the latter undermines Midwinter's transgressive concealment of knowledge by showing that he is unable to ever hide secrets that Armadale truly needs, in this novel Ezra does successfully contain his secret history only to prove that for a racial Other, repression of this knowledge is physiologically harmful, to the point that his internally contained secrets literally infect him. Thus, the novel disapproves of his concealment by showing it to be not only abnormal, but pathological. And though accomplishing their task in different ways, both novels consequently use the idea of self-control as a way to marginalize racial Others' power by limiting their possession of knowledge, and implying that their personal histories, their racial origins, and any other secrets, are the rightful possessions of their English counterparts.

Collins's novels also focus on female control over knowledge, or lack thereof, revealing an anxiety similar to that which necessitates the containment of racial Others. *The Woman in White* particularly betrays an underlying need to prevent women's control of secrets, strongly illustrated in its picture of Laura Fairlie, who possesses almost no power to hide her thoughts and feelings. As Laurel Erickson observes, "In *The Woman in White*, faces reveal secrets and 'speak the truth' even when their owners have no intention of doing so,"[11] a truth epitomized by Laura whose face and manner are characterized by unconscious "tells." The most memorable example occurs on her honeymoon with Sir Percival, who, angered by her previous love for another man,

[11] Laurel Erickson, " ' In Short, She Is an Angel; and I Am-': Odd Women and Same-Sex Desire in Wilkie Collins's Woman in White," in Marilyn Demarest Button et al., eds., The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999) 98.

discovers that the man was Walter Hartright when his name is mentioned in company: "I did all I could to control myself…my eyes and my husband's eyes met, and I knew, by his look, that my face had betrayed me"(*WW* 264). However, Collins also incorporates this liability into the cornerstone of Laura's moral code, her virtue of "simple truth"(73), which expresses itself physically in facial and bodily states which anyone may read and interpret. Even before they communicate on the subject, Walter, at this time her drawing-instructor, realizes that Laura has discovered his secret love for her by "reading" her: "the true face owned all and said, in its own frank, simple language- I am sorry for him…"(76). Laura's lack of control over her face and manner seem to be even more unconscious and natural than those losses of self-control that Midwinter and Ezra experience; rather, the novel implies that Laura's strict principles of truth render her practically incapable of disguising any kind of suppressed knowledge, especially that which she sees as deceitful. Confronted with the possibility of mendacity in keeping her already-engaged heart a secret from her betrothed, Sir Percival, she confesses to Marian that suppression of the secret has made her "miserably helpless" and unable to "control [herself]"(169), finally resolving to end "this miserable concealment"(171). The novel thus suggests, then, that Laura's inherent honesty and principles of ingenuous veracity make it almost a physical impossibility for her to contain and conceal knowledge.

Laura's natural, and virtuous, betrayals of knowledge notably contrast with the novel's cautionary illustration of female suppression embodied in her aunt, Madame Fosco. After being parted for an interval of a few years, Marian is shocked at first to see Eleanor Fairlie's transformation from a "vain foolish woman" to a "civil, silent, unobtrusive woman," observing that the change has made the Countess "as cold as a statue"(220). While Madame Fosco's icy manner renders her exterior singularly impassive, Marian yet notes certain "changes of

expression" and "inflexions of tone" which she interprets as signs that her aunt's "suppression may have sealed up something dangerous in her nature, which used to evaporate harmlessly in the freedom of her former life"(221). As the novel depicts the Countess to be in all respects "a willing instrument in her husband's hands"(309) for the completion of his treachery against the heroine and hero, and a depository of all his secrets, it implies that Eleanor Fosco's "suppression" is partially that of knowledge relating to the Count's diabolical plans, a physical containment that reveals itself in the signs which indicate "something dangerous" underneath her frigid facade. Acting as an accomplice to her husband, the Countess facilitates the great entrapment of both Laura and Marian, engaging in a dangerous conspiratorial concealment which results in the sisters' separation and Laura's incarceration in an insane asylum. *The Woman in White* consequently reveals its preference for a woman whose knowledge "evaporate[s] harmlessly" from her body, making a feminine virtue out of Laura's unconscious hemorrhaging of secrets, and a vice out of Madame Fosco's unwomanly enclosure of knowledge.

Just as Sir Percival reads the telling betrayals in his wife's countenance, Walter's similar ability to understand the bodily expression of Laura Fairlie's thoughts and feelings becomes a source of power that fuels his social ascendance. Anne Cvetkovich especially notes the strong relation between Walter's access to knowledge and his climb up the social hierarchy;[12] analyzing the hero's excessive description of Laura's beauty, she argues that "he reads the signs of her position as if they *emanated naturally from her body* rather than being a function of her social position."[13] The related argument to be made here is that the novel positions Laura's unconscious bodily communications as available material which allows Walter an insight into his lover, as he comes to interpret these expressions as evidence of her vainly suppressed thoughts or

[12] Anne Cvetkovich, Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalists, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 88; my emphasis.
[13] Cvetkovich 76 ; my emphasis.

feelings. When he "discovers" from her body language that she has become aware of his love for her, and also her own feelings for him, he claims to "[understand] but too well the change in her manner" (75). Her momentary lapses of self-control also betray emotions and thoughts that allow Walter an indication of her inner turmoil with to regards her transgressive feelings for him: when Marian tells her, in a veiled way, of Sir Percival's imminent arrival she turns completely pale and her "lips themselves trembled visibly" (78),[14] a moment repeated on the eve of Walter's departure from Limmeridge, when her "face grow[s] pale all over" and "her lips [tremble]"(129). D. A. Miller argues that Walter's professed reluctance to "…[invade] the innermost sanctuary of [Laura's] heart"(75) is proof of "an unwillingness to *know* Laura, the better to affirm without interference the difference between him and her, man and woman."[15] However, I would rather argue that it is Walter's professed desire "know" Laura, or at least his belief that he can successfully read the bodily expressions of her secret thoughts, that allows him a position of power over her. Although, as shown, Laura's loose bodily containment of her emotions and thoughts can communicate secrets to villains as well, still the novel approves of her incapacity for concealment as this condition emphasizes feminine vulnerability and disallows her any hidden power over men.

The ideal of Laura, then, serves as a required antidote to the "dangerous" women like Madame Fosco and Lydia Gwilt, whose possession of knowledge threatens men, in Madame Fosco's case by suppressing information that could help Walter in his investigation, and in Lydia's by using her superior knowledge to manipulate Armadale and Midwinter. Notably,

[14] Although Walter does not yet know of Laura's engagement, and thus does not technically understand what Laura's agitation means, he does correctly interpret (or in retrospect, claims that he could correctly interpret) that her physical disturbance has been caused by her feelings for him, as she knows she must soon marry Sir Percival: "The kind sorrowful blue eyes looked at me, for a moment, with the prescient sadness of a coming and long farewell"(78).
[15] D.A. Miller, "*Cage aux folles*: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," Representations 1.13 (Spring 1986): 124.

Laura does not marry Walter until, having been mentally traumatized by being kidnapped and falsely imprisoned in an asylum, she can no longer suppress any secret feelings, instead "show[ing] [Walter] her thoughts as a child might have shown them"(436). Thus, *The Woman in White* figures knowledge as a substance that should ideally flow out from women and be placed under male control. Importantly, while the novels marginalize both women and mixed-race characters' power through this lack of control over knowledge, for women the lack is portrayed as natural and desirably feminine, while for racial Others this inability to contain knowledge is depicted as a consequence of a physiological inferiority that reflexively comments on their "otherness."

Walter's authorial manipulation of the history he is relating, however, further complicates this idea of a unidirectional flow of knowledge, as his accounts of particularly his "reading" of women in the novel suggest his own reinterpretation of events, an imposition of his need to counter women's threatening concealment of secrets from his investigation. Laura Fairlie's double, and half-sister, Anne Catherick particularly embodies this threat of concealment for Walter; because of the similarity of their appearance, Cvetkovich argues that the sole reason for Walter's preference for Laura must be his attraction to her higher social status,[16] but the novel also seems to locate a difference between Anne and Laura with regards their relationship to knowledge. In the Woman in White's first encounter with the hero, Anne confronts Walter while the latter is walking late at night, petitioning his assistance in directing her toward a carriage. Already unsettled by her appearance, he attempts to question Anne after she expresses a strange dislike for "[men] of rank and title,"(37) but his inquiries are politely rebuffed, placing him in an "excited state"(38) of curiosity which she never fulfills. Unlike Laura, her body also rejects his attempts to read her: "…being forbidden to make any more inquiries, I stole a look at

[16] Cvetkovich 90

her face. It was always the same; the lips close shut, the brow frowning, the eyes looking straight forward, eagerly yet absently"(38).

In reaction, Walter denies Anne's ability to remain a closed system in their second interview, through his description of her reaction to his charge that she is trying to defame Sir Percival due to a loss of her honor: "not the faintest trace of any secret consciousness of shame struggling to the surface appeared in her face- that face which *betrayed every other emotion* with such transparent clearness" (109; my emphasis). Walter's textual gloss of this moment diminishes the appearance of Anne's physical control, effectively rewriting her previous bodily concealment of secrets and simultaneously asserting his ability to thus read and interpret Anne's physically expressed emotions. Much of the critical literature about *The Woman in White* has focused on the symbolic "whiteness" of both Anne and Laura, which renders them blank templates that others "write" on: in arguing about how Sir Percival, the Count, and Walter all at times construct the identity of Laura, Cannon Schmitt particularly observes that "Laura and Anne Catherick…most resemble one another in their blankness, their function in the text as that which is to be inscribed."[17] While Schmitt illustrates Anne's marginalization as a " 'graphic' othering,"[18] it will also be argued that Anne and Laura can also be seen as textually othered through Walter's authorial control. His account of his meeting with Anne does not just emphasize his own abilities to "know" her, but privileges his reading of her body over her own voice, claiming that "No words that ever were spoken could have assured me, as her look and manner now assured me, that the motive which I had ascribed…was plainly and distinctly the wrong one" (109). This interpretation echoes his earlier analysis of Laura's "telling" expressions that betray an awareness of his secret, a mode of unconscious communication that he claims is

[17] Cannon Schmitt, " Alien Nation: Gender, Genre, and English Nationality in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," Genre 26 (1993): 303.
[18] Schmitt 305

"the *plainest, the truest,* the kindest of all warnings, for it came *silently* from her" (75; my emphasis). As author, then, he creates the representations of Laura and Anne's bodily betrayals of knowledge, illustrating them with signs which he can understand and interpret. By basing Walter's assertions on his readings of their silent "communications," Collins has his hero substitute his own interpretation of their bodily-confessions for their own personal narratives, erasing their voices from the text, and thus effectively suppressing any agency they could have possessed.

Controlling Women: Defusing Female Sexual Threat

The need to limit women's power, especially over knowledge, also manifests itself in Collins's consideration of female sexual threat, a force that the texts imply must be controlled as it endangers masculine power. Serving as a prime example, *The Woman in White* originates Walter's need to textually contain women's power over knowledge in his first pivotal encounter with Anne Catherick, which sees him threatened with a loss of his sexual self-control. As many critics have noted, the early scene in which Anne surprises Walter while walking at night seems to direct the hero's consequent journey of self-realization in the novel, and D.A.Miller even suggests that the meeting is "the trauma [the novel] need[s] to work through."[19] Still shocked at seeing her suddenly appear, Walter hesitates to fill her strange request that he accompany her without asking questions. In reliving the episode, he suggests that Anne subsequently uses sexual power in order to persuade him to comply with her wishes: "…she came close to me and laid her hand, with *a sudden gentle stealthiness*, on my bosom- a thin hand; a cold hand (when I removed it with mine) even on that sultry night. Remember that I was young; remember that the hand which touched me was a woman's" (36; my emphasis). His uneasy appeal to the reading audience underlines his fear of a loss of sexual self-control, and though this sexual impulse is

[19] Miller 110

also a sign of male virility and masculine sexuality, yet the fact that it is uncontrollably provoked by a woman explains why Walter is anxious that the reader will see this moment as unmanning. It is also not a coincidence that this humiliation coincides with his agreement to Anne's wishes, which are essentially not to "interfere"(35) with her in any way and, as shown above, not to question her, not to know anything about her. Walter's submission to Anne's sexual persuasion, and subsequent complicity in allowing her to remain a mystery, underlines his own feminizing loss of sexual self-control, and hence implies that capitulating control over knowledge to women will result in emasculation. *The Woman in White'*s message then would seem to be a simple warning; if men do not take control of women, women will take control of men. And, as shown above, Walter does learn and employ this principle, subsequently counteracting the threat of Anne through his own reconstruction, and seeking instead the hyperbolically truthful, and ultimately infantilized, Laura.

The anxiety that *The Woman in White* implies in linking female sexual threat and masculine control over knowledge is a theme that Collins also explores in *Armadale*, delineating more strongly in the dangerous character of Lydia Gwilt, a woman capable of wielding sexual power to extract knowledge from her victims. Lydia moves into the neighborhood of Thorpe Ambrose to act as governess for Armadale's tenant, Miss Milroy, with the private motive of marrying the newly ascended squire for his money. Lydia commands an incredibly strong sexual power that attracts men of all kinds, and can also entrap them with her sexual fascination as she does with both her spy Mr. Bashwood and Ozias Midwinter. The novel describes several times how the "magnetic fascination of her touch" (*A* 792) controls both men, mastering Bashwood to the point that he literally begins to tremble in her presence, ensuring a subservient loyalty that subordinates him completely to her bidding. More importantly, her sexual allure also causes

Midwinter to lose sexual self-control several times during their courtship: during their first private meeting in her apartments he becomes overwhelmed by the same "magnetic fascination of her touch," and consequently kisses her hand (465). While, unlike in her relationship with Bashwood, she eventually professes to reciprocate Midwinter's love, the novel colors her initial attraction to him with an insatiable need to know about him and possess his history. After his first indiscretion with her, and his consequent dispute with Armadale about the latter's surveillance of Lydia, Midwinter writes her a mysterious letter claiming that "fatal consequences" (487) will result from their relationship, referencing, unbeknownst to her, what he believes to be Armadale's prophetic dream. Ironically, this vague forewarning only incites Lydia's curiosity further: "I never longed in my life as I longed to see him again, and put these questions to him" (498). The author describes her strong interest as "a perfect fever of curiosity" (498) and "a frenzy of curiosity" (501) to unlock the secret of Midwinter, an anticipation of finally "knowing" him expressing itself "literally in a fever"(503) when they next privately meet. Because of his refusal to confess his "dreadful story" (508) Lydia gradually resorts to methods of seduction, "nestl[ing] a little closer to him," touching cheek to cheek, and embracing him with her arm. After his last tantalizing refusal, though, she is no longer able to suppress the power of her "frenzy of expectation": "My curiosity, or more like my temper, got beyond all control. He had irritated me till I was reckless what I said or what I did. I suddenly clasped him close and pressed my lips to his" (508). Thus, the novel shows that Lydia is ready and willing to use her sexual power, and even sexual measures, to force Midwinter's confession from him, marking her as a dangerous femme fatale.

But while Miss Gwilt parallels Anne Catherick in her use of sexual manipulation to make Midwinter relinquish control over knowledge, her physical frenzy of curiosity rather reflects

Walter Hartright's own frustrated, and feminine, position of lacking access to information. Jenny Bourne Taylor argues that Lydia "loses [power] when she becomes subjected to her own desire for Midwinter,"[20] and this argument could be modified to a claim that Lydia loses power through the loss of control which results from her own greed for Midwinter's secrets. As shown, Lydia almost literally catches the "detective fever" that the characters in *The Moonstone* joke about, which expresses itself in an uncharacteristic physical agitation that signals a disruption of her physical self-control. Significantly, Midwinter only enhances this agitation by surprising her during their interview with the knowledge that he possesses damaging information about her past connection with Allan's mother. Though he believes her when she denies being the woman concerned in his and Allan's past, the revelation transforms her interrogation's purpose from simple curiosity to a real need to determine if Midwinter knows too much about her. Hence, that Lydia's subsequent efforts to force Midwinter's confession of his secrets, knowledge now vital to her determination to stay and complete her scheme against Armadale, precipitates her own confessed loss of self-control qualifies her power as the femme fatale who threatens the hero; though she gains control over her prey's secrets, she does so only by losing control over her usually well-guarded manner. By thus incorporating her moment of sexual triumph over Midwinter into the frenzied crescendo that leads to her own loss of self-control, the novel undermines her power as a sexual threat, particularly to the well-being of Allan, and counteracts the anxiety Lydia causes in her manipulative extraction of Midwinter's knowledge by equating it with an almost lustful, desperate sexual attraction which destabilizes her.

Serving as an interesting contrast to these examples of female sexual threat, whereas Anne and Lydia represent portraits of dangerous female sexual power that robs men of their

[20] Jenny Bourne Taylor, In the Secret Theatre of the Home: Wilkie Collins, sensation narrative, and nineteenth-century psychology (New York: Routledge, 1988) 168.

control, in *The Moonstone* Collins also depicts the hero Franklin Blake as commanding a sexual fascination, similar to Lydia's, over women in the novel. The audience's first introduction to Franklin occurs when he runs up the beach of the Shivering Sands to meet Betteredge, the butler, who has been sitting with Rosanna the housemaid, who immediately falls in love with this "adorable human creature" (*M* 334). His cousin Rachel Verinder also falls in love with him, and it is the two women's intense passion for Franklin that leads them to keep the secrets about his theft of the Diamond, of which each knows a part. This thus leads to his confrontation with Rachel who, having seen him steal the Diamond in his laudanum-induced delusion, has kept his secret but broken relations with him, convinced that he stole her jewel in order to pay off his debts. Faced with a fear of possible dishonor in being suspected by Rosanna, Franklin resorts to visiting Rachel uninvited in order to interview her about the theft. In the course of the emotional meeting, Franklin uses his sexual power over her to force a confession of all the details about the night in question. He takes her hand, which in his grasp remains "powerless and trembling," a sign that precipitates Franklin's triumph that "I was her master still!"(365). Though a supposedly spontaneous action, the detective exploits Rachel's fascination for his own magnetic touch, capitalizing on her sexual attraction to him in order to collect the evidence he needs. Heller emphasizes this scene as a vital example of the relationship between knowledge and power in the novel, arguing that "Blake's role as a detective, his search to repossess Rachel's knowledge, reinforces the control over women that Victorian gender ideology gave to men within courtship and marriage."[21]

Franklin's awareness of his sexual influence, and the novel's sanction of his consequent use of this sexual power to control Rachel's body, and through this her knowledge, acts as a revealing parallel to Lydia's similarly strong influence over men. Whereas Collins privileges

[21] Heller 152

Franklin's physically violating manipulation of Rachel, as it is in the service of vindicating his innocence and restoring his personal honor, he figures Lydia's own obsession for discovering Midwinter's secrets as fueled by both a greedy consumption of information as well as a panicked attempt to disguise her treacherous past. Thus, a male hero's power over his lover's knowledge is shown as a natural right that only facilitates the happy resolution of mysteries and problems, whereas female sexuality is stigmatized as the threat that confuses and disrupts male agency and power. This realized dynamic again parallels Lydia's own fears about the compromised sexual boundaries of marriage, and reinforces the idea that men have a right to a woman's body and its secrets, and that any resistance to, or subversion of, this power dynamic may warrant restraint.

The "other" Race: Dynamics of Subordination and the Marginalization of the Racial Other

As these novels tend to marginalize female power by sanctioning the suppression of women's control and denigrating female sexual control as abnormal and dangerous, as touched on before, both *Armadale* and *The Moonstone* exhibit a similar tendency to tame and control the dangerous agency of the racial Other. There exists a very strong parallel between the novels in the friendships of Midwinter and Armadale, and Franklin and Ezra respectively, which illustrates the different ways that Collins constructs and re-constructs the subordination of Other to Englishman. Analyzing Collins's interest in race, Audrey Fisch argues that many of his novels exhibit a need to work through England's racial issues, including a history of slavery and colonialism, and that "incorporating mixed-race people into traditional English society allows Collins to reimagine his world and restore Victorian values."[22] She argues that Collins uses several different methods to exorcise the responsibility of racial subjugation, which reflect his need to limit the English guilt from past Imperial oppression. While the present argument will

[22] Audrey Fisch, "Collins, Race, and Slavery," in Maria K. Bachman et al., Eds., Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003) 314.

support the idea that Collins uses these novels, and these pairs of characters, to work through issues of race, it will also question to what extent Midwinter, and particularly Ezra, are ever really "incorporated" into society, or the nature of colonialism really doubted, since, as previously argued, the underlying force of these novels seems to be a need to identify and control the potential power of the racial Other.

The narratives particularly sanction a power inequality in these relationships, effected in each through the burden of gratitude placed on the racially-marginal character which positions them as the debtor of their English counterpart. As argued before, in *Armadale* the novel privileges Allan with a special insight into Midwinter's losses of self-control, allowing him to benefit from his friend's breached containment of knowledge which is conditioned by his racial otherness. Midwinter's subjection to this power that Armadale wields, ostensibly unconsciously, seems to result from the unequal power dynamic of their relationship, originating in the former's indebtedness to Allan's initial kindness. After Midwinter is found in Allan's neighborhood, having wandered with a fever through the countryside and eventually fallen unconscious, the Good Samaritan takes responsibility for Midwinter's case by paying for his care and keeping him company, for which charity the sick man reacts with "a savage rapture of gratitude"(*A* 75). The description of the patient's outburst underlines a connection between Midwinter's "savage" racial difference and his emotionally destabilizing gratitude, a "fervor of thankfulness" (75), which positions him as a colonial Other who becomes overwhelmed by the magnanimity of a noble Englishman.

Surprisingly, however, Collins shows that Allan is not above using this gratitude to command Midwinter's continued companionship, capitalizing on the power that his role as benefactor grants, and using this advantage to create an inequality of social power between his

friend and himself. Following his surrogate son's philanthropic assistance, Mr. Brock regrets that Allan takes a "violent fancy to the castaway usher" and that he invites Midwinter to "reside permanently in the neighborhood, in the new and interesting character of his bosom friend" (72). Though the narrator's description implies the that these are the feelings of Mr. Brock, yet the impulsiveness of Allan's decision, and the fact that his sudden affection for Midwinter seems largely due to the fact that the latter is simply "[not] like all the other fellows in the neighborhood"(76), does underline an artificiality and even theatricality in the arrangement, implicating Allan as a director that has assessed Midwinter's suitability to play the part of his "bosom friend" in life. Armadale's subsequent outburst at his friend's departure, precipitated by Mr. Brock's suggestion, more strongly illustrates this artificiality through Allan's anomalous adamancy that Midwinter must return; to Mr. Brock he exclaims that "I like the poor fellow, and I won't give him up" (80), a statement which almost openly acknowledges an ownership of his friend, evoking an idea of Midwinter as a colonial possession. And indeed Armadale capitalizes on his right of possession when he follows Midwinter in order to "persuade" him to return, eventually resorting to blackmail: "Allan had asked next for his friend's address in London-…and had got the address at last by making an appeal to Midwinter's gratitude, for which (feeling heartily ashamed of himself) he had afterwards asked Midwinter's pardon" (80). The episode shows that Armadale is not as unconsciously generous as he appears, and that he is not only aware of his own graciousness, and what can be construed as his friend's debt, but will also use that power to subordinate Midwinter to his will.

This event significantly colors Midwinter's later description of his and Allan's dynamic: defending his decision to return to Mr. Brock, he explains his dilemma of being unable to resist Armadale, saying "The dog's master has whistled….and it's hard, sir, to blame the dog, when the

dog comes" (97). It is difficult not to interpret this last statement as his internalization of a social dynamic that Allan creates, which forces Midwinter into the position of a colonial Other that must be grateful to his imperial benefactor and show this gratitude through subordination to his control. Although the novel uses Allan's blandness and blundering to illustrate a hyperbolically naïve character, supposedly incapable of premeditated exploitation, at the same time the lack of importance ascribed to his unfriendly assertion of power over his supposed friend and Midwinter's subsequent willing and eager submission to this dynamic highlight the novel's fairly explicit approval of the marginalization of the latter's identity as colonial subject, and thus a suppression of his agency.

As though wishing to further distance the English hero from this possibly mean association with actively controlling the Other, in *The Moonstone* Collins depicts a parallel relationship between an English hero and a racially mixed and socially displaced character in which the latter is complicit in creating his own social subordination. As in *Armadale*, Franklin Blake is first attracted to Ezra Jennings because of his feelings of compassion for the suffering he sees the latter has endured, claiming that Ezra "made some inscrutable appeal to my sympathies which I found it impossible to resist" (*M* 388). Franklin suffers from an initial ambivalence about whether he should involve himself with Ezra in searching for knowledge about the theft, which pits his sensible "knowledge of the world" against this more intuitive sympathy for the pathetic figure of the physician's assistant; the hero's "interest" (388) in Ezra, which overwhelms his better judgment, would thus seem to be initially guided by his perception of Ezra as an object of pity. Unlike Midwinter, though, Ezra almost upsets this compassionate view of himself by making it a condition of his disclosure of Mr. Candy's knowledge that Franklin tell him about his involvement in the affair, his secret shame of stealing the Diamond. However, Ezra then

immediately attempts to diminish the threat he poses by confessing to Franklin his own intense gratitude for Franklin's companionship, admitting to him that he would be incredibly thankful just to be of use to his new friend, having "speculated on the chance of [Franklin] feeling a passing curiosity about what [Mr. Candy] wanted to say" (401). Ezra's hope to use his knowledge to gain Franklin's friendship, however, parallels, but significantly differs from, Rosanna Spearman's more threatening desires earlier in the novel; upon finding Franklin's stained nightgown, proof that he is the thief, Rosanna begins to plan how to use the evidence to her advantage in making Franklin notice her. As a reformed thief herself, she admits in her letter to him that she reveled in the idea that, as she says, "you had let yourself down to my level" (341). However, when Franklin continues to ignore her, Rosanna declares that her plans turned towards blackmail: "…you were at my mercy- I had got the whip-hand of you, as they say" (347). Whereas Rosanna timidly joys in the prospect of possessing some control over Franklin in the form of a "claim on [his] confidence and…gratitude" (350), Ezra decidedly emphasizes that even more than a hope for friendship, he is grateful merely for Franklin's existence, explaining that the latter's blessings of "youth, health, riches, a place in the world, [and] a prospect before [him]" are what "reconciles" (401) Ezra to his own bleak future and imminent death. Thus, *The Moonstone* offers a different but still reassuring portrait of a racial Other who himself constructs an imperial/ colonial subject dynamic; instead of questioning the reason for the disparity between his and Franklin's circumstances, a potentially subversive act, this colonial Other instead subordinates himself to the English golden hero, to whom he willingly capitulates all control over his happiness as his only hope is to bask in the glow of Franklin's happiness and that of his similarly fortunate class.

These texts also reinforce the subordinating social roles of mixed-race characters by restricting their potential for subverting this controlling dynamic of gratitude. In analyzing underlying racial dynamics in *Armadale,* Caroline Reitz observes that the time leading up to the book's publication was turbulent with respect to England's imperial identity, which had been destabilized by disconcerting events in its colonies, such as the 1857 Indian Sepoy Mutiny and the trial of Governor Eyre, over his misrule in Jamaica.[23] She specifically argues that Lydia's disruption of the strong friendship binding Midwinter and Armadale represents the upsetting force of colonial guilt/"gwilt" over possible misrule of colonial subjects, but that by her eventually becoming the common enemy of both men, the two friends can expel "a potentially threatening other and superimpose unity onto their internal differences."[24] However, while supporting Reitz's reading of the Armadale/Midwinter relationship as an allegorical method of reconstructing an imperial/colonial Other dynamic, I would suggest that this argument does not take into account the ways that this text interests itself rather in figuring racial difference in an inequality of power, implying Armadale's superior agency as imperial representative particularly through Midwinter's failure to successfully assert his own power of control over his own life.

Midwinter's attempt at controlling his own life, and subverting the power dynamic which Allan establishes, significantly takes the form of his marriage to Lydia Gwilt. As argued before, Lydia wields a significant sexual power over Midwinter, one that convinces him of her being innocent of any connection to his father's tragedy, divides him from the man he has sworn to serve, and breaches his control over his buried secrets. However, as touched on initially, Lydia despairs that, even very early in their marriage, Midwinter inexplicably ceases to show any signs of love or attraction for her. Instead, she complains that her husband seeks "refuge" (*A* 669)

[23] Caroline Reitz, "Colonial 'Gwilt': In and Around Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*." Victorian Periodicals Review 33.1 (Spring 2000): 95.
[24] Reitz 99

from her in Allan, who soon after their move to Italy, comes to join the domestic circle. While many critics interpret Allan's interposition here as an assertion and renewal of his and Midwinter's dynamic, representing a diminishment of the latter's feelings for his wife,[25] this does not take into account Midwinter's own motives for marrying Lydia. Both the marriage and his emotional and physical distance from Lydia would seem to be ways of asserting his own power of control over his wife, a position that is fundamentally different from his previous capacity as Armadale's grateful and dependent friend. The novel explicitly demonstrates his belief in this assumption of husbandly power over Lydia after their penultimate confrontation; furious at discovering her complete deception and marital betrayal, Midwinter vows that though "she has denied her husband to-night," still "she shall know her master to-morrow" (762). Midwinter's behavior suggests that in marrying Lydia, he perceives that he will assume a rather patriarchal domestic authority over his wife, which will grant, as emphasized in his righteous exclamation, a controlling power over her. He enters the marriage state, then, not only to become his own master, but to also become the master of another.

However, the novel ultimately suppresses this colonial Other's flight from subordination by implying that Midwinter's racial heritage makes him fundamentally incapable of succeeding in his supposedly authoritative role as husband. Lydia relates in her diary that, on their honeymoon, Midwinter is given ominous advice from an Irish doctor, who cautions him about his ability to take on the role of provider for his new family: "Your face tells me more than you think…if you are ever tempted to overwork your brain, you will feel it sooner than most men. When you find your nerves playing you strange tricks, don't neglect the warning- drop your pen" (671). That the doctor locates the main "symptom" of his diagnosis in Midwinter's face

[25] Besides Reitz, see for example: Bachman, Maria K. and Don Richard Cox. " Wilkie Collins's Villainous Miss Gwilt, Criminality, and the Unspeakable Truth." Dickens Studies Annual. 32 (2002):319-33. The authors argue that Armadale and Midwinter's relationship is homosexual, a bond which excludes Lydia, and forces her to kill herself.

obliquely alludes to the latter's racial difference, his described "swarthy face" (146), suggesting that the projected reason for his inability to endure the trials of intellectual work is a racially inferior constitution and mental capacity. Lydia's account would seem to validate the prediction, as she observes that her husband does "[tax] his brains beyond what his brains will bear" (670). The greater amount of time that he must then devote to his writing further alienates his wife, as she feels herself the victim of a husband who is "irritable and overworked" (675). While his constitutional weakness proves to make him unfit to be a proper manly provider, the novel suggests that this same physical deficiency is also responsible for his ultimate loss of control over his wife. Confronting her in her new lodgings, Midwinter's aspect begins to change, his othering "savage blood" (757) again accompanying his overwhelming anger in the face of his wife's denial of their marriage: "he came on till he was within arm's length of her- and suddenly stood still….His eyelids fell, his outstretched hands wavered, and sank helpless. He dropped as the dead drop"(758). In losing control over himself he also becomes unable to curb his wife's insubordination; in fact, his outburst underlines his impotency, which the novel again illustrates as the result of his racial heritage. Almost immediately after his failure to wield marital power, Midwinter is fatefully reunited with his old friend Armadale, and soon feels a reemergence of "the old grateful interest in his friend which had once been the foremost interest of his life" (783). Consequently, whereas Reitz argues that the Armadales' thwarting of Lydia's plans diminishes difference, the novel rather seems to undermine the anxiety of colonial guilt by demonstrating the Other's physical and social inferiority. *Armadale* reassures the English audience that a colonial subject is fundamentally incapable of wielding any power of control, and will consequently return to a grateful position of subordination to an English master. In this way Midwinter truly becomes the "other" Armadale.

While Midwinter tries to subvert his dynamic with Armadale by seeking dominance in the domestic realm with Lydia, Ezra also threatens to reverse his grateful subordination to Franklin by becoming in turn the hero's savior and the architect of his happiness. After Franklin has confessed his entire involvement with the theft of the Diamond, Ezra exclaims "I believe the vindication of your innocence is in my hands!" (*M* 402), a claim that underlines the role he will play in achieving what Franklin describes as his own objects in the novel, discovering the part he played in the scandal, and, more importantly, restoring the gentleman's honor. Ezra also is thrilled that, in re-establishing Franklin's good name, he will be paving the way to a restoration of the latter's relationship with Rachel. When Ezra first realizes that proving Franklin's innocence will bridge the couple's rift, he marvels that he could be "chosen to be the means of bringing these two young people together again" (419). His conjecture of being "chosen" alludes to an almost exalted position, an agent of Fate sent to assist the couple, and the joy he feels in the mission of restoring the couple simultaneously emphasizes his desire to live vicariously through their romantic reunion.

But, even more than in *Armadale*, the novel only presents the possibility of a mixed-race character's integration into English society in order to undermine it, here through Ezra's gradual social marginalization. While Midwinter's implied racial inferiority sabotages his bid for power in marriage, in *The Moonstone*, despite an obvious possibility for controlling his friend, Ezra's potentially threatening potential for power is dampened in the novel through the emphasis placed on his exclusion from Rachel and Franklin's romantic dynamic. After the successful conclusion of the experiment which Ezra devises to prove that Franklin's theft of the Moonstone was unconscious, Rachel implores Ezra to let her watch over her sleeping lover, asking the former to empathize with her position: "Oh Mr. Jennings, if you were me, only think how you would long

to sit and look at him. Say, yes! Do!" (451). While Rachel watches Franklin, though, Ezra watches Rachel watching her love, eliciting thoughts of his own past romance and specifically "the gentle eyes which had once looked love at *me*" (451-2), paralleling Rachel's devotion to Franklin with his past love's devotion to him, and imagining himself consequently in Franklin's position. While the novel allows Ezra the opportunity of indulging in the vicarious emotions of reconstructing Rachel and Franklin's relationship, his experience of their reunion from both sides of the dynamic and the practical inability to realize either relationship in his own life highlight his displacement in the text. The last scene of the three together depicts Rachel tending to Franklin, as Ezra watches from a more distant vantage, preparing finally to leave them alone together (452), symbolizing his ultimate exclusion from his friends' happiness. By desiring to live through the lovers in order to re-experience his own fractured romance, Ezra simultaneously constructs his own social marginality, contentedly excluding himself from the newly constituted domestic happiness of the lovers. Thus, whereas *Armadale* works through colonial issues by containing the colonial Other's subversion of control, *The Moonstone* again gradually defuses the threat of racial difference by presenting an Other who will willingly become a socially peripheral figure, portraying Ezra as one who will not only use his knowledge to aid Englishmen and unravel their mysteries, but who also will ultimately accept, gratefully, a marginal social role in the interests of English happiness.

Conclusion

This cross-section of Wilkie Collins's work reveals, then, a very strong impetus towards containment of the same social categories of individuals that Collins ostensibly seems intent on integrating into his narratives, often in order to argue, explicitly or implicitly, for their social equality. As shown, the novels instead exhibit an inherent need to undermine the control of

mixed-race and female marginal characters through the overlapping expressions of compromised self-control, control over knowledge, or power over other characters, in order to construct, or re-construct, their subordinated dynamic in relation to the sanctioned power of the novels, the English hero. These works thus present transgressive possibilities in order to diminish their socially subversive nature within the realm of the narrative, literally containing the threat within the pages of the novel; socially marginal characters who maintain control over knowledge are divested of their secrets, women who threaten sexual loss of control themselves lose control, and racial others who attempt to subvert the imperial dynamic are again subordinated to an English willpower. The narratives also qualify the above-stated notion that sensation novels mainly identify threat in the "terror of the familiar," since these novels locate danger in both "familiar" and "unfamiliar" social categories. But these works also, unintentionally, demonstrate how similar are the transgressions of the internally threatening female Other and the externally threatening racial Other; both are ultimately shown to challenge English power through their potential to subvert the subordinated role that society demands. Perhaps this becomes the most terrifying concept of all for the English reader: both that the individuals categorized as racially other could bear any resemblance to English women, and that these same women could attempt to counteract their social marginalization in ways similar to colonial subjects. Hence, these novels' main purpose becomes that of locating and diminishing threat, presenting the possibility of ubiquitous threat but ultimately controlling that fear by localizing the menace in certain individuals, and eventually restoring the disrupted social order through their containment.

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